

later."

His comments came as the state reported its second human case of the season - in an elderly woman from Seward County.

A spokeswoman for the Nebraska Health and Human Services System said the woman, who is older than 65, is recovering from West Nile fever.

The state's first case was reported June 15 in a Lincoln woman. In addition, two birds, a sentinel chicken and three pools of mosquitoes have tested positive for the virus this year. Iowa has reported one person's death.

Last year, Nebraska at this time had several positive human cases awaiting federal confirmation, and the virus had shown up earlier and in greater numbers of animals.

Kramer said the hot, dry summer of 2003 offered ideal conditions for the kind of mosquitoes that carry West Nile.

The drought-resistant *Culex tarsalis* mosquitoes and infected birds probably concentrated around irrigation systems and wetlands to get water, he said, and the heat helped the virus amplify quickly.

The virus, which causes flu-like illness or no symptoms in most people but which can cause brain damage, is spread to humans through mosquito bites.

Health officials urge people to wear DEET-containing insect repellent and long sleeves and long pants when outside and to avoid being outdoors at dusk and dawn.

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Doe Run at odds with officials over recontamination rate

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Statistically significant recontamination of yards continues to occur within a half mile of the Doe Run lead smelter, according to the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) and Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) interpretation of the latest quarterly testing.

Doe Run and the government continue to be at odds regarding the rate of

contamination.

"It's basically statistically significant within a quarter mile and isolated from a half mile out to a mile," said David Mosby, remedial project management unit chief for the DNR.

Mosby said the recontamination rate, which could be as high as 60 parts per million a year, might result in dangerous levels of lead in less than 10 years.

The DNR considers levels of lead higher than 400 parts per million to be potentially unsafe,

"Doe Run has spent \$11 million to reduce lead levels, but it is starting to look like more needs to be done," Mosby said. "The question is whether the recontamination is significant enough to beef up controls and the preliminary answer is yes."

Road contamination also continues to be a problem, according to the DNR's latest findings.

"We're seeing concentrations on roads that we consider unacceptable," Mosby said.

According to Mosby, concentrations of lead as high as 30,000 to 40,000 parts per million were still being found in the streets, mostly along haul roads. A plan developed to address transportation has not proven entirely effective, he said.

"There's something missing, but we're not sure what it is," Mosby added the high street concentrations of lead are not an "immediate risk."

Barb Shepard, vice president of human resources and community relations for Doe Run, said the company continues to dispute the conclusions made by the DNR and EPA.

"We don't agree with the conclusions and we have shared with the state what we believe are the errors," Shepard said.

Shepard said that, for example, two of the homes with high lead readings had gravel driveways, which naturally have elevated lead levels.

"It is our indication that this is an anomaly," she said. "It is important to look beyond the statistics."

Shepard added that while some contamination is inevitable next to an operating smelter, the rate of recontamination is not nearly as high as the DNR suggests.

Exponent, a company commissioned by Doe Run to look at the testing data, found elevated levels in only three sites, all within the buy-out zone. Exponent also determined that it would take 44 years for the recontamination to reach dangerous levels. Questions also remain about the source of contamination, according to the study.

The DNR believes progress has been made in creating a safer environment in Herculaneum, but that more needs to be done.

"It's dramatically better than it was in 2001," Mosby said. "There are fewer kids being exposed. It's been cut way down but it's still not enough."

Mosby said the DNR is talking with Doe Run officials about the possibility of extending the end of the year deadline for area homeowners to accept Doe Run's buyout offer.

"There is the potential that the deadline could be extended but there is no assurance," he said.

Homeowners concerned about the potential for sustained recontamination will have more information from a DNR report due before the deadline.

Herculaneum Mayor John Chamis said he would like to see the buyout area extended.

"I'd like to see the area extended to include other houses," he said. "I'd also like to know where the (affected yards) are because I live nearby."

Replacement of yard soil with lead concentrations in excess of 800 parts per million is expected to finish by the end of the year. The timetable for yards with levels in the 400 to 800 parts per million range is unknown.

Since the project began, 291 yards and 101 home interiors have been decontaminated.

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The Wichita Eagle

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